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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how the University of Dayton, Ohio, has strengthened teacher education through the creation of two institutional general education initiatives that integrate general and professional education in a coherent learning experience. The first is a CORE program that is open to all students pursuing degree work in the elementary program. CORE is an interdisciplinary curriculum designed to fulfill and integrate the university's general education requirements. Students take 10 courses that fulfill all general education requirements as well as the basic skills requirements in reading and writing. The second includes a Humanities Base and thematic cluster in fulfilling general education course requirements. It has all students examine what it means to be human through four required general education courses in the humanities. To facilitate an integrated view of various domains of knowledge and to encourage students to understand the broad world around them, all undergraduates must complete one thematic cluster. These program efforts emphasize integration and coherence so that students can see the connectedness of the disciplines and the interrelationships of disciplinary ideas. (SM)

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# The University of Dayton Core Program

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## I. Overview

This session will focus on how the University of Dayton has strengthened teacher education through the creation of two institutional general education initiatives that integrate general and professional education in a coherent learning experience. The first is a CORE program that is open to all students pursuing degree work in the elementary program. The second includes a Humanities Base and thematic clusters in fulfilling general education course requirements. These program efforts emphasize integration and program coherence so that students can see the connectedness of the disciplines and the interrelationships of disciplinary ideas.

## II Description of Innovations

***CORE***: CORE is an interdisciplinary curriculum designed to fulfill and to integrate the University's general education requirements. Students take ten courses (six in the first-year, three in the second, and one in the third) that fulfill all general education requirements (except physical and life sciences) as well as the basic skills requirement in reading and writing. Faculty teaching in CORE work together to integrate the material in their courses and encourage students to draw on what they are learning in other CORE classes.

Annually, CORE enrolls approximately 105 students with a variety of academic profiles; it is not an accelerated or honors program. All entering first-year students are invited to apply; students in some majors in the College of Arts and Sciences are enrolled automatically; students in elementary education are encouraged to enroll.

***Humanities Base***: The Humanities Base asks all students, no matter their division or major, to examine what it means to be human through four required general education courses in the humanities. These courses are integrated disciplines by a common set of issues and readings as well as through programs - - plays, performances, speakers - - offered outside the classroom. These issues and readings are examined in workshops several times a year by the faculty that offer these courses and staff from student development who sponsor campus programs. Preferably completed in the student's first year, the goals are for students to develop their own concepts of what it means to be human, to integrate their general education program with their professional preparation, and to create a community of learners that crosses boundaries of disciplines and liberal and professional education. The course options are:

History: HST 101, History of Western Civilization from Its Classical Roots to 1715 or HST 102, History of Western Civilization Since 1715 or HST 198, History Honors Seminar

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| Philosophy: | PHL 103, Introduction to Philosophy |
| Religious Studies: | REL 103, Introduction to Religion (choice of Catholic, comparative religion, or scripture option) |
| English: | ENG 102, College Composition II<br>ENG 114, Freshman Writing Seminar<br>ENG 198, Freshman Honors Seminar |

***Thematic Clusters***: To facilitate an integrated view of different domains of knowledge and to encourage students to understand the broad world around them, all undergraduates must complete one thematic cluster. A thematic cluster is a series of courses from the domains of knowledge, focusing on an issue central to the human condition, one that connects the Humanities Base with its focus on what it means to be human with a student's education as a professional. To fulfill the thematic cluster requirement, students must complete a minimum of three approved courses in a single cluster, representing three different domains of knowledge. For the purpose of thematic clusters, philosophy and religious studies are considered separate domains of knowledge. The domains of knowledge are defined as arts studies, historical study, philosophy and religious studies, physical and life sciences, and the social sciences. Students receive specific information about thematic clusters from their faculty advisors. Students must have the approval of their advisors before selecting and registering for a thematic cluster. *The Guide to the University General Education Program* describing all approved clusters and their course offerings is distributed to all students via hard text and through a dedicated website.

***Historical Overview***: The CORE program was the first curricular innovation undertaken by the University. It was initiated experimentally in the 1980s and became mature as a program in the 1990s. A description of how and why it evolved is outlined below.

In 1985, the University developed a CORE program with the support of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. This ambitious program integrated ten courses, mostly in the humanities, with some social science courses, around the theme of "pluralism and human values." The faculty from the School of Education became actively involved in the development of the CORE curriculum and took advantage of the theme to enhance their own curriculum. In short, all the professional schools had students, admittedly a limited number, enrolled in programs that achieved positive results by systematically integrating general education courses.

Also in the 1980s, the University supported faculty seminars within which faculty could look at major contemporary issues in an interdisciplinary fashion. In large part, the idea for these seminars originated with faculty meetings to discuss "pluralism and human values" as preparation for offering the courses in the CORE program. The faculty identified the topic, developed the structure, and provided the leadership for the seminars. The University administration limited its role to funding the faculty and assuring that faculty from the professional schools were included in the seminars.

During this period, the University sponsored an ongoing conversation among the faculty and

across the campus about the traditions, mission, and direction of the University. Faculty seminars focused on a variety of issues including social justice, values and technology, the Catholic intellectual tradition, and global issues. These seminars combined with discussions held across campus and among faculty led to a growing consensus that the University's curriculum and the students' learning experience should better reflect the mission and traditions of the University.

In 1988, the Academic Senate began a three-year process of first reviewing and assessing existing general education requirements and then proposing revisions. Initially, few faculty members or University administration thought that much would result from this assignment, but the Committee, led by professional school faculty in good part, took its charge seriously. Surveying and interviewing faculty, students, and administrators, the Committee found much dissatisfaction with existing requirements. The Committee concluded that few faculty understood the rationale for the requirements, that the requirements lacked coherency and integration, and that, consequently, the requirements did not reflect the Catholic and Marianist identity (or mission) of the University. After exhaustive discussions and numerous iterations based on faculty responses, the Committee submitted a revised general education program consisting of a Humanities Base for the first-year students and thematic clusters for upperclass students. In April 1991, the Academic Senate overwhelmingly approved the changes.

Clearly, the adoption of an integrated, coherent set of general education requirements was not the result of singular work by central administrators (i.e., the President). The effort of the University administration in the early 1980s to set goals for University requirements and revise the curriculum faltered on the lack of consensus among the faculty as to the institutional mission. Consequently, the faculty made the parochial interests of their departments and their division their paramount concern in reviewing and revising the curriculum. By the late 1980s, the faculty had reached some consensus about the mission of the University, the distinctive educational goals of the institution, and the relationship of these goals with professional education. Without such consensus, revision efforts would have failed. And without a clear definition of and substantial public dialogue regarding the University's mission, consensus would never have been possible.

The Humanities Base and Thematic Cluster programs were initiated in the 1990s. A history of development somewhat similar to that of the CORE occurred. One problem with the CORE is that it limited student enrollments. The Humanities Base and Thematic Clusters emerged to address the broader range of needs of the University and to be inclusive of all students.

III The College of Arts and Sciences has administrative control of all the above programs. Faculty from the various professional schools are actively involved in dialogue about program goals and purposes and they do have opportunities to influence the structure of various cluster course requirements. But, ultimately, all control for the program rests with Arts and Sciences.